

Introduction to Gender Studies

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Key concepts, historical background, major theories, and contemporary issues

1. What Is Gender Studies?

Aspect	Description
Definition	An interdisciplinary field that examines how gender shapes social life, power relations, identity, culture, and institutions.
Scope	Combines sociology, anthropology, history, literature, psychology, political science, law, media studies, and more.
Goal	Understand and critique the ways gender influences experiences and structures, and promote equity and social justice.

2. Core Terminology

Term	Meaning
Sex	Biological attributes (chromosomes, hormones, anatomy).
Gender	Socially constructed roles, behaviors, and identities associated with “masculine” and “feminine.”
Gender Identity	Personal sense of being male, female, both, neither, or somewhere along a spectrum.
Gender Expression	External presentation of gender (clothing, speech, mannerisms).
Cisgender	Gender identity aligns with the sex assigned at birth.
Transgender	Gender identity differs from the sex assigned at birth.
Non?binary / Genderqueer	Identities outside the male/female binary.
Intersectionality	Overlapping systems of oppression (e.g., gender + race + class).
Patriarchy	Social system where men hold primary power and dominate institutions.
Heteronormativity	Assumption that heterosexuality is the default or “normal” orientation.

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3. Historical Overview

Period	Milestones
Late 19th – Early 20th?c.	Women’s suffrage movements; early feminist writings (e.g., Mary Wollstonecraft).
1940s?1960s	Emergence of “women’s studies” courses; Simone de?Beauvoir’s <i>The Second Sex</i> (1949).
1970s	First formal “Women’s Studies” departments; feminist theory diversifies (liberal, radical, socialist).
1980s?1990s	Rise of queer theory; Judith Butler’s <i>Gender Trouble</i> (1990) introduces performativity.
2000s?Present	Intersectionality becomes central (Kimberlé Crenshaw); global gender justice movements; digital activism.

4. Major Theoretical Perspectives

Theory	Main Proponents	Core Idea
Liberal Feminism	Betty Friedan, John Stuart Mill	Equality through legal reforms and policy changes.
Radical Feminism	Catharine MacKinnon, Andrea Dworkin	Patriarchy is a fundamental system; focus on reproductive rights and violence against women.
Socialist/Marxist Feminism	Angela Davis, Silvia Federici	Gender oppression linked to class exploitation; capitalism reinforces gender hierarchies.
Intersectional Feminism	Kimberlé Crenshaw, bell hooks	Multiple axes of oppression intersect; analysis must include race, class, sexuality, etc.
Queer Theory	Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick	Challenges fixed categories of gender/sexuality; emphasizes fluidity and performativity.
Postcolonial Feminism	Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Gayatri Spivak	Critiques Western-centric feminist narratives; foregrounds colonial histories.
Transfeminism		